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Borrowers' Day

Jessie E. Henderson

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THE PENN PUBLISHING COMPANY
PHILADELPHIA

Borrowers' Day

A Rural Comedy in One Act

By
JESSIE E. HENDERSON



PHILADELPHIA
THE PENN PUBLISHING COMPANY
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Borrowers' Day

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Borrowers' Day

CHARACTERS

FRED BURNHAM	.	.	<i>who has not seen the village for three years</i>
DEACON DODGE	.	.	<i>a peppery pillar of the church</i>
NATHAN BURNHAM	.	.	<i>friendly to Hyde when Mrs. B. isn't looking</i>
SAMUEL HYDE	.	.	<i>fond of Burnham behind Mrs. H.'s back</i>
MARTIN JENNINGS	.	.	<i>nephew of Mrs. Grant, engaged to Kitty</i>
MRS. BURNHAM	.	.	<i>Fred's mother, and no friend to Mrs. Hyde</i>
MRS. HYDE	.	.	<i>who is convinced Fred is a scoundrel</i>
MRS. GRANT	.	.	<i>fat, comfortable, gossipy</i>
MRS. DODGE	.	.	<i>President of the Ladies' Society for the Suppression of Frivolous Literature</i>
KITTY HYDE	.	.	<i>who still wears Fred's ring</i>
MYRTILLA MONTMORENCI	.	.	<i>the village poetess—who started the feud</i>

PLACE.—Borrowdale Village.

TIME.—The present.

TIME OF PLAYING.—Thirty minutes.

STORY OF THE PLAY

It is Borrowers' Day in the village, and every one is supposed to bring borrowed articles to Mrs. Dodge's house. The deacon gets back his umbrella, and finds it has the parson's name on it. Mrs. Hyde returns "Lady Geraldine's Past," which every one has read and no one will accept.

A false "switch," a counterfeit half dollar, and a box of rouge cause embarrassment to their owners. Fred Burnham comes back after an absence of three years to find Martin has borrowed Kitty Hyde's heart. He also finds a feud between the Hydes and Burnhams. Mrs. Hyde accuses Fred of having stolen a cake from her pantry the night he went away. Kitty is cool, but Fred finds she still wears his ring. She quarrels with Martin, and Fred has his chance. Then Myrtilla, the absent-minded poetess, remembers that she was the one who borrowed the cake. The feud is over, and Kitty's heart finds a new borrower.

CAST AND COSTUMES

MRS. DEACON DODGE. Flustered by the responsibility of having so much company all at once. A prim lady, rather nervous. President of the Ladies' Society for the Suppression of Frivolous Literature. Middle-aged.

DEACON DODGE. Shrewd business man, high temper. White hair and beard—typical country deacon-farmer.

MRS. GRANT. Fat, comfortable, gossipy. A widow of middle-age.

MARTIN JENNINGS. Her nephew; a "smart Aleck"; young; countrified; awkward; in love with Kitty.

MRS. HYDE. Mother of Kitty; quick-tempered; snappish in manner; leader of a feud against the Burnhams.

MR. HYDE. Good-natured; hen-pecked; friendly to Mr. Burnham when his wife isn't looking.

KITTY HYDE. The village belle; engaged to Martin Jennings. Well-dressed.

MRS. BURNHAM. Envious of the Hydes and leader of the feud against them; catty; choleric. Mother of Freddie. Her tone is usually injured and melancholy.

MR. BURNHAM. Fond of Mr. Hyde, when his wife isn't round; meek; always speaks gently, as if afraid of Mrs. Burnham.

FREDDIE BURNHAM. In love with Kitty Hyde; a progressive young man who has a sense of humor. Well-dressed.

MYRTILLA MONTMORENCI. Village poetess; dreamy; fantastic; lamentably absent-minded.

The action takes place in Mrs. Deacon Dodge's sitting-room, which is an ordinary farmhouse "parlor." The characters, with the exception of Myrtilla, are dressed in ordinary clothes with countrified touches. The women wear aprons and sunbonnets or old straw hats. Deacon Dodge has a red bandanna around his neck. Martin's clothes do not fit well. Freddie and Kitty are well-dressed. Myrtilla has a Grecian or other fantastic costume, a wreath in her hair, which is "slicked" back tightly in absurd contrast to her floral ornament; she wears nose glasses that continually drop off.

PROPERTIES

FOR MRS. DODGE. A large jardinière filled with cut flowers or branches, or ferns. The foliage must be large and thick enough to hide the face of a person standing behind it. Box of rouge and powder-puff.

FOR FRED. Dress suit case.

MYRTILLA. Paper and pencil. A large cake.

MRS. HYDE. Book, the size of an ordinary novel. It is bound in a stiff cover, over which is drawn a heavy paper or cambric wrapper. Inside the wrapper is a folded note.

MARTIN. Umbrella. Coins in pocket.

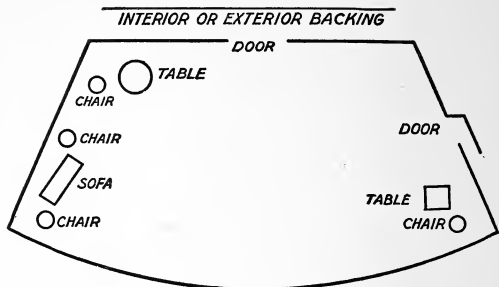
KITTY. Two rings. Locket.

MRS. BURNHAM. False hair.

MRS. GRANT. Half dollar, supposed to be counterfeit.

SCENE PLOT

SCENE PLOT



SCENE.—Mrs. Dodge's "front room" or sitting-room. Door up c. leads outside the house. Door L. leads to dining-room. Table and chair up R. Sofa and chair down R. Small table and chair down L. Other simple furnishings that might be found in a country house. The play may be successfully given without formal scenery.

Borrowers' Day

SCENE.—*Front room at MRS. DEACON DODGE'S.*

(*As the curtain rises there is a knock at the door c. At almost the same moment MRS. DODGE enters L. with a jardinière in her arms ; the jardinière is filled with a huge bouquet of flowers and branches which, as she hugs it to her, completely blocks her view. She proceeds cautiously toward the table. There is another knock at the door c., and then before MRS. D. has a chance to speak FRED BURNHAM pushes it open.*)

MRS. D. (*halting up L. c., and trying in vain to peer round or through the bouquet ; startled by the opening of the door*). Heavenly day !

FRED. Yes. Isn't it ?

MRS. D. Oh, howdy do, Parson Smith ? My ! You putty nigh scairt me ! (*The jardinière begins to slip.*)

FRED (*setting suit-case on floor and coming down c.*). Let me help you. (*Grasps the other side of jardinière.*)

MRS. D. Thank ye, parson. (*Notices his hands ; gives a little scream.*) Them ain't Parson Smith's hands. I say, them ain't his hands !

FRED. Now that you call my attention to them, I'm not sure that they are.

MRS. D. (*much flustered*). You ain't the parson. I say you ain't !

FRED. I know it.

MRS. D. Then who be ye ? (*Tries to peer through branches or around them. Retreats a few steps down L., and FRED—still grasping the other side of jardinière—follows.*) I—I—I don't want to buy nothin'.

FRED. That's fortunate. Because I haven't a thing that I want to sell.

MRS. D. (*still more flustered*). If it's food you're after, just step 'round to the kitchen door —

FRED. Thank you, Mrs. Dodge. I'm not at all hungry.

MRS. D. (*backing down to C., FRED following; she faces L.; he faces R.*). Who be ye, anyways? Tell me right away, or—or—or I'll holler for my husband.

FRED (*simulating alarm and trembling so that he shakes the jardinière*). Don't! Please!

MRS. D. (*relenting*). Maybe you wanted to return somethin'?

FRED. Return something? But I haven't taken anything.

MRS. D. It's Borrowers' Day, you know. Wasn't they somethin' you wanted to bring back?

FRED. Yes. I want to bring back your memory of a troublesome little tyke that always used to chew gum in Sunday school—though you told him where bad little boys would go.

MRS. D. But—but—they wasn't never no tramp in my Sunday-school class! (*FRED laughs.*) Let me set these flowers down on the table, so's I can see what you are, anyhow —

(*She backs up R. toward the table with great caution. FRED follows, still holding the other side of the jardinière. At the table she slowly and timidly lowers the bouquet.*)

FRED. Booh!

MRS. D. (*shrieking and jumping, then recognizing him*). Fred-die Burn-ham! It ain't! It can't be! Bless my stars! You've scairt me just about to death. Why, I ain't seen you for three years, and you're just as big a tease as ever. (*Wrings his hand.*) Where you ben all this time? Where you ben, I say?

(*FRED leads her down C.*)

FRED. In the place where bad little boys go to. (*MRS. D. is shocked.*) New York.

MRS. D. Seems to agree with you, anyways. Set down. (*She sits on sofa down R. He brings chair and sits.*) I heard you was there, though your maw kept kinda quiet about where you was, you droppin' outa sight so sudden like — (*Stops in confusion.*)

FRED (*a trifle sadly*). Yes. I dropped out of sight. "Sudden like." There were reasons —

MRS. D. Don't you say another word. I don't believe a thing Mis' Hyde says about you, even if you did steal it.

FRED (*indignantly*). Steal what? And what does Mrs. Hyde say about me?

MRS. D. Land! There goes my tongue again. I ain't got no more sense than a goldfish. But ever since your maw an' Mis' Hyde had that fight, the day after you went to New York — (FRED *looks amazed*.) Didn't you know your maw and Mis' Hyde ain't ben speakin' for nigh onto three year?

FRED. Never heard a whisper of a quarrel. What's the matter?

MRS. D. (*confused*). Why—ah—(*speaking very slowly and carefully*) Mis' Hyde says—leastwise, she alleges—(*stopping to consider the word and repeating it*) she alleges that you sto—kinda took—a Lady Baltimore cake she baked for the new Methodist minister's supper. Three years ago, you know.

FRED. She says I stole her cake?

MRS. D. She alleges that you—ah—kinda took it off'n the pantry window-sill.

FRED. Well, upon my word! (*Begins to grin*.) And—er—how about my mother? Didn't she have anything to allege when Mrs. Hyde alleged all this?

MRS. D. (*smiling in spite of herself*). Well, of course you know your maw is a very—ah—high sperrited woman. And when Mis' Hyde said what she said, why your maw said things, and then Mis' Hyde wouldn't let her husband go 'round with your paw —

FRED. Poor dad! And nobody told me a word about it!

MRS. D. Why, the village is all tore apart over it to this day, some on Mis' Hyde's side and some on your maw's. (*Hastily*.) I'm neutral, myself, and allus was. And your maw and Mis' Hyde ain't spoke for years.

FRED (*musings*). And our families used to be the best of friends. The best of friends.

MRS. D. (*shrewdly*). Ain't it funny how folks change? Kitty Hyde's engaged to Martin Jennings now.

FRED. Kitty Hyde! (*Turns away*.) How—how nice!

(*Rises and goes L.*)

MRS. D. (*dryly*). Yes. Ain't it, though? (*Brief pause.*) Sometimes I've thought Kitty wa'n't any too pleased at you disappearing so sudden like.

FRED (*bitterly*). I assure you that Miss Hyde didn't mind how suddenly I disappeared.

MRS. D. No? Well, now that you've returned —

(FRED crosses R. and sits.)

FRED (*eager to change subject*). That reminds me: what did you mean, a while ago, by asking if I wanted to return anything?

MRS. D. Why, it's Borrowers' Day. You know, us ladies in the Ladies' Suppression Society —

FRED. The Ladies' what?

MRS. D. (*importantly*). The Ladies' Society for the Suppression of Frivolous Literature. Well, we've renamed this village "Borrowdale." Honest, Freddie, it's perfectly scandalous the way people have borrowed things from their neighbors and never returned 'em. So t'other day when your Aunt Sally Grant couldn't find her knittin'-needles that the Browns had borrowed to open a bottle of olives with, the night of the sewing-bee, and her wantin' 'em special on account of knittin' a new scarf for the new minister, his throat being so delicate he has to stop right in the middle of his sermon sometimes to hem and haw and fuss and cough and —

FRED (*holding up his hands*). Mrs. Dodge! This is too distressing.

MRS. D. Well, your aunt said wouldn't it be a good idee for every one that had borrowed anything to return it on a certain day. So we set to-day for the day. And my house is the center for every one in this section to meet and return things, and I do hope I'll get back that ice-cream freezer I lent the Thompsons two years ago next month, though I suppose I won't, and it's a judgment on me for lendin' outside my own neighborhood. (*Gasps for breath.*) People'll be comin' purty soon now, I reckon. You must stay, Freddie, and get acquainted with your neighbors all over again. All except the Hydes, of course, for your maw won't let you speak to them.

FRED. No. (*Rises.*) I must run along home. Haven't seen mother yet. Perhaps I'll come back with her. I have a little two-day vacation, and want to surprise my folks.

(*Goes up c.*)

MRS. D. But, Freddie! I haven't asked you about your New York job, nor nothin'. I want to know —

FRED. All right. See you later, Mrs. Dodge. (*Picks up bag and looks out doorway, c.*) What have we here?

MRS. D. (*going up c.*). Heavenly day! It's Myrtilla Montmorenci! (*Comes down R.*)

FRED. Myrtilla Montmorenci? Why — (*Looks earnestly out door.*) Oh, yes; I remember her. She writes poetry. (*Goes L. c.*)

MRS. D. (*soothingly*). Yes, yes. So she does. But we hadn't ought to hold it agin her, I say. All of us has our leetle peculiarities.

(*Enter MYRTILLA MONTMORENCI, c.; she has paper and pencil in her hands.*)

MYRTILLA. Good—(*stopping on threshold to write word on paper; advances; looks up*) good-afternoon, Mis' Dodge. Can you tell me a word that rhymes with "Niagara"? I'm writing an ode on Niagara Falls, that marvelous expanse of water that drops down, down, down, in swift—in turbulent —

MRS. D. (*matter-of-fact*). This is Freddie Burnham, Myrtilla. You remember Freddie, of course.

MYRTILLA (*absently*). Of course. Nicaragua almost rhymes. Ticonderoga—not so good. (*Reads from paper.*) "Behold the mighty cataract, the glorious Niagara—greater than the greatest stream that vexes Nicaragua —"

MRS. D. (*down R.*). I'm sure I don't see why Nicaragua should be vexed over it, Myrtilla. It's a real nice waterfall, to my way o' thinkin'. Not that I ever seen Niagara myself, but my aunt went there on her honeymoon and liked it real well, though it was a dreiful expensive trip in them days, but I reckon the rates is reduced by now, and anyway they run excursions in the autumn.

MYRTILLA (*up c., shuddering*). Dear, dear Mis' Dodge, do not mention vulgar money in the same breath with that vast torrent whose unbridled —

MRS. D. "Unbridled"? With all them bridal couples traipsing there? It's the most bridled waterfall I know anything about. Though I never seen why Miller's crick

wa'n't just as good to look at, and cost a lot less—only a nickel car fare.

MYRTILLA (*dreamily*). Niagara—Pythagoras ; Niagara —

FRED (L.). “Staggerer”?

MYRTILLA. A thousand thanks ! (*Writes ; notices him for first time.*) Why, it's Freddie ! Freddie, ever ready ; ever true and steady—ever —

FRED (*hastily*). I'm no subject for poetry, Mrs. Montmorenci.

MRS. D. } (*together*). “Mrs.” !

MYRTILLA }

FRED. Oh, aren't you married ? When I left town three years ago your name was Myrtilla Stubbins.

MYRTILLA (*hand to heart*). Don't ! Ah, don't ! My poetic nature rebelled at the horrid cognomen with which fate had shackled me. My Muse refused to soar when bound down to that crude and ugly appellation of “Stub—Stub”—I cannot, cannot pronounce it. My verses, when e'er I recalled that name, lost their ethereal —

MRS. D. (*practically*). In short, she swapped names.

MYRTILLA (*shuddering*). “Swapped” !

MRS. D. And hit upon that thar name of “Montmorenci” and took it.

MYRTILLA. “Hit upon” ! Dear, dear Mis' Dodge, the choice of that name was made after long and agonizing thought.

FRED. I don't doubt it. (*Picks up bag.*) But I'll see you ladies later.

(*Exit C., hastily.*)

• MYRTILLA (*pleased*). Really ? (*Simpers and comes down C.*) Such a nice boy. I'll just write an ode to him—it would please him, don't you think ?

MRS. D. I dunno. Some people are pleased with 'most anything. What've you brought ?

MYRTILLA. “Burnham—learn 'em ; Burnham—turn 'em ; Burnham —”

MRS. D. (*louder*). I say, what've you brought ?

MYRTILLA. “Burnham—dern 'em ; Burnham—Burnham—Burnham —”

MRS. D. I say, what've you brought ?

MYRTILLA. Brought ?

MRS. D. Brought.

MYRTILLA. Brought?—Why, that doesn't rhyme with Burnham. It rhymes with thought and fought and wrought.

MRS. D. Rot!

MYRTILLA. "Freddie Burnham, from New York ——"
What rhymes with New York?

MRS. D. Myrtilla Montmorenci, listen here. What've you brought back that you borrowed?

MYRTILLA. New—York. Is there nothing that rhymes with New York but stew—pork?

(Loud bang heard L.; angry voices; chairs overturned; door slammed. MRS. D. jumps. MYRTILLA, unheeding, wanders to table up R.; sits down, scribbles, pausing now and then as if for inspiration.)

(Enter DEACON DODGE in rage, L.; slams door; stamps across room, then comes down L.)

MRS. D. *(going to him, timidly)*. What ails ye, Ezra?

DEACON. What ails me? What ails me? *(Shouts.)*
Liniment ails me. Wife, I've fired the hired man. *(Goes C.)*

MRS. D. Fired him?

DEACON *(C.)*. Fired him clean through the kitchen window.

MRS. D. *(down L., in distress)*. Oh, Ezra! Oh, how terrible! Did it break?

DEACON. I opened it first. Out he went—*(kicking furiously and almost falling backward)* and his vile deceptions with him.

MRS. D. Deceptions? Oh, Ezra!

DEACON. Deceptions and contraptions. Him and his bicycle! Ye know what thet thar rascal done? Used my rheumatism liniment to ile the joints in his bicycle. "Young man," I says, "don't you know it's wicked to waste first-class liniment on a second-hand wheel? Don't you know," I says, "that waste leads to want and want leads to temptation and temptation leads to sin and sin leads to ——"

MRS. D. Sh! Ezra!

DEACON. So I opened the kitchen window, and then ——

(Illustrates and again nearly falls backward.)

MRS. D. *(anxiously)*. Had he used much of it?

DEACON *(going up R.)*. Sp'iled the best part o' a pint.

(*Pounds under MYRTILLA'S nose and on her paper.*) The best part o' a pint! Drew the cork —

MYRTILLA (*rising with a little shriek, clutches his hand*). "Drew cork"! "New York"! Oh, Deacon, I thank you! (*Still clutches him with one hand as she writes on paper with other.*) Listen! "The sunset lay all over New York—red as wine when you've drew the cork —"

DEACON (*up C.*). What! Woman!

MRS. D. Really, Myrtilla! And you a member of the temperance union!

MYRTILLA (*up R.*). But it's only poetic license.

DEACON. License? License? Hain't this a no-license village?

MYRTILLA (*timidly*). But—but—what can I say, then?

MRS. D. I'm sure the sunset never looked like any kind of liquor to me.

MYRTILLA. Ah, but you are not filled with the great poetic thirst —

DEACON. Thirst? Thirst? No decent man or woman ever felt a thirst. (*MYRTILLA is again oblivious.*) Woman, do you hear what I say?

MYRTILLA. What rhymes with "sky-scraper"?

MRS. D. Fly paper?

(*DEACON glares at them both and exit, L., speechless with rage.*)

MYRTILLA (*gratefully*). Dear, dear Mis' Dodge!

(*Writes.*)

MRS. D. But, really, Myrtilla, you must change that line about the sperrits in the sunset. Deacon doesn't like it at all—I could see it annoyed him. Now, why not "red as ink when you've drew the cork"? I'm sure there's nothing objectionable about ink. Or red as tonic? Raspberry tonic is a real pretty shade of red.

MYRTILLA (*doubtfully*). Tonic—of course that rhymes with "chronic —" (*Becomes dreamy again.*) I'll just go into the next room, where I can woo the Muse in silence.

(*Exit, L.*)

MRS. D. Yes, do. (*Goes up L.*) You go right into the

dining-room and you can moo the Wooze—I mean, sue the Shoos—I mean, shoo the Moose —— (*Gives it up in despair.*)

(*A firm rap at door. Enter MRS. HYDE, book in hand.*)

MRS. H. Well, of all the impudence! Humph!

MRS. D. What's the matter, Mis' Hyde? Who you humphin' at?

MRS. H. (*glaring at her, and coming down R.*) Who do you think I seen?

MRS. D. (*coming down L.*). Freddie Burnham?

MRS. H. (*surprised*). Yes. (*Gulps with anger.*) Some-folks has nerve. I met him on the street, and he had the impudence to take off his hat to me! After stealing my Lady Baltimore cake like he done! I declare, I was so mad the air seemed full of cake crumbs.

(*Bounces onto sofa down R.*)

MRS. D. (*down L.*). Well, now, Mis' Hyde, I wouldn't say he stole it—not when he's right here in town. He just sorta maybe took it.

MRS. H. Took it! If grabbing a cake right off the pantry window-sill when I had the minister to supper and the stove not baking well at all—if that ain't stealing then I dunno what is. Nobuddy else was round my pantry window that afternoon except Freddie—hangin' after Kitty, I suppose, but thank goodness, it came to nothing whatever! "Took" it! Steal is what I said, and steal is what I meant. Where's he ben all this time, I'd like to know?

(*MRS. GRANT appears at door C.*)

MRS. G. (*beaming*). I just know you're talking about Freddie Burnham. Ain't it wonderful, him coming back after all these years? I seen him leavin' here, Mis' Dodge, from my west window, through my spy-glass that was my poor dear husband's. (*Comes down C.*)

MRS. D. Your spy-glass! I've often wondered how you happened to know who called here.

MRS. G. I'm sure I don't know what you mean, Mis' Dodge. If you're tryin' to hint I'm curious, you're mistaken. I use them glasses to look at the weather with, to tell if it's a good day to hang out clothes.

MRS. D. (*coldly*). This ain't wash day.

MRS. G. (*unruffled*). Wa'al, yestiddy was, wan't it? (*Sits on chair down R.*) Now, what I want to know is, did Freddie say anything about Mis' Hyde's cake? It don't do me no good to have him for a nephew—his maw don't treat me no more confidential than if I wasn't her sister-in-law at all. I hope I ain't nosey, but if I could only find out —

MRS. H. What's he ben a-doin' of all these years? His maw says he's ben in New York. In jail, likely.

MRS. G. I heard he's some kind of a speculator.

(*Shocked silence.*)

MRS. D. } (*together, in loud whisper*). Speculator!

MRS. H. }

MRS. H. I wouldn't put it beyond him.

MRS. G. Wa'al, I hope to holler! If that ain't just like the novel I was readin' about—"Lord Hunter's Fatal Fling."

MRS. D. A novel!

MRS. G. (*hurriedly*). Before I j'ined the Ladies' Society for the Suppression of Frivolous Literature, of course. I took it away from my hired girl. Ain't it terrible how them girls will stuff their minds with such low books? I tell you, ladies, the Suppression Society is doin' a great work in this town. We can't never be too grateful to Mis' Dodge for startin' it.

MRS. H. Novels was ruinin' the village. I believe Freddie Burnham's downfall is due to reading paper-backed novels. I wonder his maw can hold up her head, and her settin' in the front row at church every Sunday.

MRS. D. Sh! Here comes his maw now.

(*Goes up C. and greets MRS. BURNHAM, who enters C.*)

MRS. B. (*affably*). Good-afternoon, ladies. (*Sees MRS. H. and stiffens. Pause. Both glare; then MRS. B. sweeps to chair down extreme L. of stage, going so close to MRS. H. that the latter has to draw her feet in quickly.*) I'm a leetle mite late, but I've had such a grand surprise! My poor boy is home on a visit.

MRS. H. (*to MRS. D.*). "Poor" is ker-rect!

MRS. B. (*venomously*). My poor, persecuted boy —

MRS. H. (*to MRS. D.*). If he'd ben a prosecuted boy, there'd 'a' ben less trouble in this town.

MRS. B. My poor, persecuted boy that certain parties has tried to slander with false, malicious stories. But he has rose fur, fur above such mean doin's. He's a successful business man now—he ain't stuck in the mud in a leetle one-hoss town like the husband of a certain party I know.

MRS. H. (*bouncing with rage, but always speaking to Mrs. D.*). Better stuck in the mud of a little town than lost in the mire of the stock market.

MRS. B. (*unheeding and always addressing Mrs. G.*). Ain't it wonderful how quick a bright young man can rise in the world nowadays? When poor Fred went away he had scurcelly forty dollars in his pockets —

MRS. H. If I was to tell all I know, I could show you a young feller that never knew the difference between a silver dollar and an honest day's work, because he never saw neither. But I hold no malice, and I won't say nothin'.

MRS. B. (*oblivious*). Ain't it queer, Mis' Dodge, how some people ain't never learned to be a lady no matter how long they associate with refined people like the Ladies' Society for the Suppression of Frivolous Literature? Ain't it wonderful how they keep their same old manners—if you could call 'em manners—and interrupt people so rude?

MRS. D. (*mildly*). Well, well, Mis' Burnham, it takes all kinds of people to make a world. (MRS. B. *is pleased*; MRS. H. *angry*.) Don't it, Mis' Hyde?

(MRS. H. *is pleased*; MRS. B. *angry*.)

MRS. B. As I was tryin' to tell you, Mis' Dodge, my son Freddie has a grand job now. He gets fifty dollars a week. (MRS. H. *laughs derisively*; MRS. B. *stops to glare*.) It just shows that you can't keep an honest man down.

MRS. H. Did I hear the word "honest," Mis' Dodge? It's too bad certain parties won't never study a dictionary. Some people would even have the courage to mention pantry in the same breath with honesty; or Christian in the same sentence with cake.

MRS. B. (*rising and angrily shaking finger at Mrs. D.*). And I tell you, Mis' Dodge, they's a certain class of people that if you'd open a can of insect powder under their nose it'd kill 'em. (*Goes L. C.*)

MRS. H. (*leaping up and shaking finger at Mrs. G., who is alarmed*). Mis' Grant, if I wasn't a lady I could tell you exactly what I think about some people.

MRS. B. (*in a fury as MRS. D. backs away L., frightened*). I wouldn't be bothered losing my temper over some folks.

MRS. H. (*shrieking*). Some people just can't get me mad, Mis' Grant. I just won't get mad for 'em.

MYRTILLA (*bursting from dining-room with a shriek*). "Harmonic!" Oh, oh! "Harmonic." (*She comes down C.; the others look at her in amazement.*) Listen! (*Declaims with sweeping gestures.*) "The sunset lay all over New York, red as ink when you've drew the cork; the heavens, huge, high, and harmonic, stained the shade of raspberry tonic;—when into town came Fred L. Burnham, to meet those smart folks and to learn 'em."

MRS. B. Delicious!

MRS. H. Delirious!

MYRTILLA. It's an ode to Freddie.

MRS. H. Why don't you write a long poem on what Freddie owed to other people? There's lots of rhymes for "cake." For instance—"Take."

MRS. B. (*viciously*). Or "Fake."

MRS. D. There, there, ladies. (*Goes R. and stands between them. MYRTILLA goes L.*) Let's not have any quarrels. Remember you're out in company now and mustn't act as though you was at home.

MYRTILLA. Home, home! There was something I borrowed that I meant to return, but I left it at home. I'll hie me hence and fetch it.

(*Exit, C.; runs into MARTIN JENNINGS on way out, but fails to notice him. As she disappears, MARTIN and KITTY HYDE enter. MARTIN has an umbrella that he stands against the wall, L.*)

KITTY. Well, have the borrowers returned anything valuable? What's the matter with every one? (*She comes down L. and takes chair at front of stage. MARTIN follows her.*) You look pessimistic.

MRS. H. The village has just had some very bad news, daughter.

KITTY. Oh, mother—what is it?

MARTIN. What is it, Aunt Sally?

MRS. G. (*officially and watching KITTY keenly*). Freddie Burnham's come back.

KITTY (*half-rising, sinks back again, and regains composure*). Oh, is that so?

(*Every one looks at her, and after a moment she yawns deliberately and elaborately.*)

MARTIN (*a bit disturbed*). Freddie Burnham, hey? Well, I should unnecessarily agitate myself.

KITTY (*impatiently*). Oh, keep still, Martin. That isn't funny.

MARTIN. Well, just because Freddie's been to N' Yawk, he ain't the whole village. Lots of fellers are just as good as him that never went very far from this town. A rolling stone butters no parsnips.

MRS. B. Well, since Freddie gets fifty dollars a week now, I reckon he can afford to have a little butter on his parsnips if he likes.

MARTIN. Fifty—dollars!

(*Jingles money in pocket and lapses into sorrowful thought.*)

MRS. H. Ten dollars in the hand is worth fifty in the—er—air, Martin.

MRS. G. Congratulations on your engagement to my nephew, Kitty. I hope you'll be happy.

KITTY. I hope so.

MARTIN (*confidently*). Oh, she will, all right.

MRS. H. I'm thankful, Martin, that you never sneaked round people's pantry windows to steal cake.

KITTY (*laughing*). Oh, mother! you are funny! What's a cake between friends?

MRS. H. Funny!

MRS. B. Friends!

KITTY. That cake has been roasted to a crisp. Roasted, and frosted, and digested. And I think it's a stale topic after three years as a steady diet. It's given the whole village a bad case of social dyspepsia. Can't we get some other kind of mental food? How's the Lady Suppressors? Or—this is Borrowers' Day. Has anybody returned anything?

MRS. H. To be sure. And I've brought back your book, Mis' Dodge. I'm real ashamed of myself for keepin' it so long, but 'twas real interestin'. (*Holds it out.*)

MRS. D. What book?

MRS. H. "Lady Geraldine's Past: Or the Blasted Career."

(*Dead silence. Then KITTY giggles.*)

MARTIN (*round-eyed*). But Mis' Dodge! I thought you was president of the Ladies' Society for the Supres-sion —

MRS. D. (*down R. C., taking book*). This ain't mine.

MRS. H. (*down R.*). I borrowed it off you.

MRS. D. (*firmly, though flustered*). 'Tain't mine. Mis' Grant left it here. (*Hands book to MRS. G.*)

MRS. G. (*placidly*). Of course I did, Mis' Dodge. You wanted I should leave it here. Don't you remember, I told you how I'd read all about Geraldine and her dread-ful past and you said how interestin' it must be, and would I let you take the book.

MRS. D. You're mistaken, Mis' Grant. I never —

MRS. G. Yes, you did, too. Yes, you did, too. I told you how per-fect-ly aw-ful that part was in the ballroom at the castle where Lord Mountjoy grabs a dagger —

MRS. H. And stabs Geraldine in the shoulder.

MRS. D. In the neck. (*Catches herself in confusion.*)

MRS. G. (*triumphantly*). Thar now! You do remem-ber!

MRS. D. Well, anyways, I—I—I had to read it in be-half of the Suppression Society, to see if 'twas really as bad as folks said.

MRS. G. (*with immense satisfaction*). It was!

MRS. H. (*with even more unction*). Worse!

MRS. D. I borrowed it off Myrtilla in the first place. (*Puts book on table down L.; still angry with MRS. H.*) You wait a minute, Mis' Hyde—I got something I bor-rowed of you. (*To KITTY and MARTIN.*) Come help me set the table for the tea and sandwiches. You don't want to stay out here with other folks, and you just engaged. Come—I want you to open a box of kisses.

(*She giggles. KITTY and MARTIN go out with her, L.*

MRS. H. and MRS. G. talk down R. MRS. B. looks at book, down L.)

(*Enter SAMUEL HYDE and NATHAN BURNHAM, arm in arm, up C.*)

BURNHAM (*amiably*). Well, then, Hyde, if we can sneak off, what do you say to a couple hours' fishing, old man?

(MRS. B. and MRS. H. *rise majestically, outraged at this friendliness*. HYDE *sees his wife and changes tactics*. BURNHAM'S *back is to L., and he does not see MRS. B.*)

HYDE (*clutching BURNHAM by arms and shaking him*). Don't you say that again, Nathan Burnham, you hear? Don't you say that again, even if you are an old man!

BURNHAM (*not seeing wife*). Say what?

HYDE (*winking carefully and shaking him*). Don't you say fishing to me. Don't you dast to say it!

BURNHAM. Leggo my arm. What's the matter with you?

HYDE (*winking*). If they wasn't ladies present, I dunno what I'd do to you, you old—old—old——

BURNHAM. Ladies present? (*Turns alertly, sees wife, and immediately falls upon HYDE and catches him by throat.*) Threaten me, would you? Use language to me, would you? I'll show you—— But no. Not in the presence of women-folk. (*Turns away; then swings back.*) Toad!

(*Comes down c.*)

HYDE (*following down c.*). Y' old he-tomcat!

BURNHAM. Ah-hh!

HYDE. Bah-hh!

(*As attention is turned elsewhere, they begin to whisper and edge to door.*)

(*Enter MRS. D., L., still resentful toward MRS. H. She comes down c. and holds out rouge box.*)

MRS. D. Here, Mis' Hyde, I found this in your sewing bag the time you left it in my dining-room. (*Takes out rouge cake and powder puff.*) I'm sure I dunno what it's for.

MRS. B. (L.). Paint!

MRS. H. (R., *embarrassed*). It—it—it's just powder to preserve the complexion.

MRS. B. Well, really, Mis' Dodge! For a church-member and secretary of the Ladies' Suppression, some people is going pretty fur.

MRS. H. (*almost inarticulate with fury.*) Kitty! Kitty! (KITTY comes to dining-room door, L.) I can't be too thankful, Kitty, that you don't work in a stock market at fifty dollars a week.

(KITTY laughs and stands in doorway, L.)

MRS. B. Stock market!

(BURNHAM and HYDE slip out C.)

MRS. D. Come into the dining-room, ladies, and have some tea. This is exhausting work.

(All leave except KITTY. She stands aside to let them through doorway, then cautiously approaches table down L., opens book, and begins to read "*Lady Geraldine.*")

(Enter FRED, C.)

KITTY (*hearing his step and closing book with a bang*). Why—you!

FRED. Why—not?

KITTY. It's you! (*Goes behind table L.*)

FRED. So it is. And unless I'm mistaken (*his tone has a thrill of feeling in spite of the lightness of his manner*) it's—you.

(*They lean across table, looking at each other.*)

KITTY (*after a long moment and a long sigh, regaining her airy manner*). You don't look so awfully desperate.

FRED. Certainly not. Why should I?

KITTY (*lightly*). Isn't it the badge of your trade?

FRED. Of my trade?

KITTY. The stock market—robbing the widow and orphan, and all that.

FRED. But I'm not connected with the stock market.

KITTY. You make fifty dollars a week in it.

FRED. In stocks?

KITTY. Somebody told mother that you were interested in stocks. Aren't you? (*Goes C.*)

FRED (*still by the table L.*). Why, yes. But there are stocks—and stocks. The kind I'm interested in grow on farms. They're chiefly pigs, and they eat our Pabulum.

KITTY. Pab—what?

FRED. Our patent food for pigs. Patterson's Pig Pabulum—Pigs Thrive On It.

KITTY (*cruelly*). So I see.

FRED. Don't treat me as if I were a ham, Kitty.

(*Goes to her, c. She goes R. and sits on sofa.*)

KITTY. New York has made you sparkle, hasn't it? You are fond of New York, Mr. Burnham?

FRED. Yes, indeed—Miss Hyde. The people are delightful, business is splendid—but I miss the home cooking.

(*Goes R. and sits in chair.*)

KITTY. Home cooking? H'm!

FRED. I don't get you, Kit.

KITTY. What's that on your chin, Mr. Burnham? (*He brushes his chin.*) I thought it was a cake crumb.

FRED (*laughing*). Honestly, Kit, you don't believe that yarn, do you? I didn't steal your mother's cake. Don't you believe me?

KITTY (*laughing*). What if you did? You were just a little boy three years ago.

FRED. But I didn't. And I wasn't such a little boy that—(*he looks into her eyes a moment; she drops her glance slowly*) that I couldn't feel things pretty deeply, Kit. You believe me when I say that I don't know anything about that miserable cake—don't you? There was a time when you believed what I said, Kitty.

KITTY. I was only a little girl myself, then. I—didn't know my own mind.

FRED (*bitterly*). You know your own mind now, it seems. Let me wish you joy.

KITTY. Oh, thank you, Mr. Burnham! Martin is such a dear boy!

FRED. He is a very fortunate boy.

KITTY. Yes—isn't he? Not at all fond of cake.

FRED. It's useless to rake up the past—but I must say you've treated me rather shabbily.

KITTY. I treated you shabbily?

FRED. On the very evening before I went away, though you knew I was going, you went out to walk with this—Martin, instead of saying good-bye to me.

KITTY. Well, this Martin had been somewhat more agreeable than it had suited Mr. Burnham to be.

FRED. I was no more disagreeable than you. I wanted to see whose picture you had in your locket, and you wouldn't show it to me.

KITTY. Of course not. It was your picture.

FRED. Then why—why were you so nasty about it?

KITTY (*heatedly*). You were nasty first.

FRED. I wasn't.

KITTY. You were.

FRED. I wasn't.

KITTY. You were.

BOTH } (*together*). { Wasn't—wasn't—wasn't —
 } { Were—were—were—were —

(*Both laugh.*)

KITTY. This is quite like old times, isn't it? If we keep on fighting, we shall soon be as friendly as ever. Anyway, you were. And I refused to show you the picture because I wanted to make you angry.

FRED. Well, you did.

KITTY (*sighing*). Yes, I'm glad.

FRED. Well, I can't understand why, when a girl has a fellow's picture, she should fly into a rage and refuse to let him see it.

KITTY. Good gracious, what else should she do?

FRED. Have you the locket now?

KITTY. Certainly. (*Holds it out.*)

FRED. Let me see the inside. (*KITTY pretends to struggle; he opens the locket and exclaims in chagrin.*) Martin's picture! (*KITTY laughs provokingly.*) What have you done with mine?

KITTY. Lost it, long ago.

FRED. I don't believe it. Kitty, I believe, away down in your heart, you still—still —

KITTY. You flatter yourself, Mr. Burnham.

FRED. You'll never marry Martin.

KITTY. Why not? Will he run away from me, without a word, like —

FRED. Without a word! Like—what?

KITTY. Like a New Yorker.—Oh, well, our little flirtation was amusing while it lasted. More amusing than this conversation. (*Rises and starts for dining-room door L.*)

FRED (*rising*). There's some misunderstanding. I didn't go "without a word." (*Points to her hand.*) You're still wearing my ring!

KITTY (*guiltily covering ring, then looking at it in pretended surprise*). Did you give me this?

FRED. The day of the high school picnic. You remember. (*She shakes her head vigorously.*) Down by the lake——

KITTY. Well, this is Borrowers' Day in the village. We're supposed to return things we'd borrowed and forgotten about—and have no further use for. (*KITTY removes ring and lays it on table down L.*) Here's what you loaned me. Let me return it—with thanks.

(*Stands down L. C.*)

FRED. Then let me return something you loaned me at the same time—with thanks.

(*He fumbles in his pockets and crosses to her.*)

KITTY. What is it?

FRED. Two of these.

(*Catches her in his arms and tries to kiss her. KITTY wrenches herself free and gives him a smart box on the ear. Then she runs up to door L.*)

KITTY. Take that as part payment, Mr. Burnham.

(*Exit.*)

FRED (*rubbing his ear*). Wow! Little d—darling!

(*Enter DEACON, L.*)

DEACON. Go on in, Freddie, and get a cup o' tea. The cup that cheers but not inebriates. Mis' Dodge is pouring it out by the bucketful, and Kitty's handing round the cream and lemon.

FRED (*going L.*). Yes, she handed me some just now. But I'm game for more. I think I'll take it, this time, with a little sugar.

(*Exit, L.*)

(DEACON looks furtively about room, goes to table down L., opens book and begins to read "Lady Geraldine." Enter MARTIN, L. DEACON closes book hastily and crosses R.)

MARTIN. Been huntin' all over for you, Deacon. (*Gets umbrella from against wall up L.*) I wanted to return this umberella you let me take t'other night. (*Comes down C.*) I b'leeve you said at the time that you wouldn't want to lose it, bein' the best you had.

DEACON (*taking umbrella*). Ah, thank you. No, I shouldn't care to part with it. In a way, 'twas a gift. I prize it highly.

MARTIN (*skeptically*). Yep. So did Parson Smith. I see he's got his name engraved on the handle.

DEACON (*examining the handle in pretended surprise*). Well, well! Funny I never noticed that before. Must've got it mixed with mine some time. You see, I had one almost exactly like this, only —

MARTIN. Only the name on the other one was mine. Oh, well, when a man once gits the collectin' fever he ain't really responsible. Keep 'em both, deacon—keep 'em both.

DEACON (*forcing a laugh*). Haw, haw! You will have your joke, Martin. But I must go feed the horses.—Very sorry.—Important. Got to hurry.

(*He rushes out L. MARTIN picks up "Lady Geraldine" and furtively starts to read. Enter MRS. G., L. MARTIN hastily slams book on table L. Behind MRS. G. comes MRS. B. They come down C.*)

MRS. B. Oh, Mis' Grant. Here's something I 'most forgot to return to you. (*Takes false hair from pocket and holds it out.*) You left this in my house on sewin' circle day, five months ago. (*Spitefully.*) Mebbe this'll help to remind you that my son ain't no speculator in stocks! (*Comes down R.*)

(HYDE and BURNHAM, arm in arm, enter C. They come down C. Enter MRS. D., L., and comes down L.)

MRS. G. (*down R., taking hair*). Thank you, dear Mis' Burnham. I didn't really expect to get it back—you borrowed it so long ago. Nice of you to return it, but I never wear a switch after some one else has used it for any length o' time. (*To BURNHAM.*) Here, Mr. Burnham, I noticed

you a-droppin' this into the contribution box at the Ladies' Aid Bazaar last week. (*Hands him half dollar.*) It must be worth quite a leetle. They tell me it's pure lead.

(*MRS. H. enters from dining-room.*)

BURNHAM (*sheepishly*). Oh, I didn't notice. That is, I thought — (*Turns to HYDE.*) Here y' are, Hyde—I knew this would git me into trouble. That's the plugged half dollar you palmed off on me in exchange for that there fishing tackle the other day.

(*Awful silence.*)

HYDE. Sir-rr! I don't understand these here jests!

BURNHAM (*suddenly remembering they are enemies*). It ain't a jest, sir—it's a insult. I'm insultin' you, sir—that's what I'm a-doin'. You come on out—they's a lot more insults I want you should hear.

(*Starts for door, c., followed belligerently by HYDE.*)

MRS. H. (*icily*). Good-bye, Mis' Dodge. Borrowers' Day don't seem to be no very grand success.

MRS. B. It's ben a occasion when them that has spitefulness in 'em has got it out, and when them that has deceit in 'em has ben showed up as they deserve.

(*All glare at one another. HYDE and BURNHAM, stepping with elaborate caution, make their escape. The women all begin to talk at once—angrily and loudly, "Well, I must say"—"Well, of all things"—"I'd like to know what right any one has"—etc. At the same time they flounce out c. MRS. D., trying to speak, follows them toward door; then turns and starts angrily toward dining-room, L., as KITTY and FRED enter L. MRS. D. stalks past them and slams the door, L. KITTY and FRED are alone. KITTY starts to go toward door, c., but FRED blocks the way.*)

FRED. You must give me a chance, Kitty.

KITTY. You're taking quite a chance now, Mr. Burnham. If Martin should catch you annoying me —

FRED. Don't you want to talk to me?

KITTY. Certainly not. And if you don't go away, I shall call Martin. (*FRED folds his arms. She calls in ab-*

surdly weak tones.) Martin! (*Silence; then she calls in very slightly louder tone.*) Mart-in!

FRED (*mockingly*). Be careful. He might hear you. (*KITTY flounces down L. to chair and sits. FRED comes down to her.*) What did you mean by saying I ran away? It's an ugly reproach. (*KITTY fidgets but remains silent.*) You didn't mean what you said—I'm sure of that. You're engaged to another man, but I can't stand by, silent —

KITTY. You've managed to keep silent for three years.

FRED. But why? That was your wish, not mine.

KITTY. My wish? That's right; blame me for everything. It was my fault that you left town without a word, I suppose?

FRED. As a matter of fact, it was.

KITTY (*noticing ring on table, L.*). Here's your ring.

(*Holds it out.*)

FRED (*trying to put it on her finger; she resists*). You wouldn't have worn this for three years if you hadn't cared —

KITTY. Let go my hand or I'll scream. (*Screams, not too loudly.*) Martin!

MARTIN (*at door, L.*). What is it?

(*FRED drops her hand in surprise and goes hastily R.*)

KITTY (*beneath breath*). Oh, botheration!

MARTIN (*entering L.*). What is it?

KITTY (*in a rage*). What do you mean by leaving me like this!

(*MARTIN comes down L.*)

MARTIN. But, Kitty —

KITTY. You know I wanted to go home hours ago, and here I've been waiting and waiting —

MARTIN. But, Kitty —

KITTY. You have no more consideration for me than — than — (*Begins to sniff.*)

MARTIN. But, Kitty —

KITTY. You're always doing something to annoy me, you—you big—big —

FRED. Prune?

KITTY. Prune.

(MARTIN glares at FRED.)

MARTIN (*angrily*). You nag at me the whole time. I won't stand it. If it's like this before we're married, what'll it be afterward?

KITTY. And you're abusing me already as if we'd been married for years.

MARTIN (*loftily*). You've got to behave a lot different, Kitty Hyde, if you're going to marry me.

KITTY. I'm not going to.

MARTIN (*astounded*). Wha-at?

KITTY. I'm not going to marry you. I won't, I just won't.

MARTIN. You just needn't. I'm sick of being hauled over the coals —

FRED. If you weren't so raw, you wouldn't require so much roasting.

MARTIN. What's that? What's that? (FRED advances toward him. MARTIN retreats to door up C.) I won't stay here to be insulted. (*With fresh courage, rushes down to KITTY.*) Gimme my ring!

(*Grabs it from her finger and rushes out.*)

FRED. So it seems you aren't engaged, after all?

KITTY. Don't taunt me with it.

FRED. I'm not taunting—I'm congratulating. Martin and you would never have made each other happy. You need a strong hand. (*Crosses L. to her.*)

KITTY. Well, of all things —!

FRED. You'll love New York.

KITTY. I'm not going to New York.

FRED. But we can't travel back and forth from here every day. We'll have to live there. (KITTY gasps.) You're engaged to me now, you know.

KITTY. Engaged? To you? After the way you treated me three years ago? (*She rises indignantly.*)

(*Enter MYRTILLA, C., out of breath, a big cake in her hand. Comes down R.*)

MYRTILLA. I had the worst time trying to get a baker's cake that looked like a Lady Baltimore.

KITTY. What on earth —

MYRTILLA. I suddenly remembered, right in the middle of my ode to Freddie, that I borrowed Kitty's mother's cake off the pantry window-sill. Three years ago it was—you know how absent-minded I am—poets are frequently that way. Well, I had company to supper and ran over to borrow some things from Mis' Hyde. She wasn't round the kitchen, and I hadn't much time, so I just borrowed the cake and intended to bake her another next day.

KITTY (*indignant*). And you allowed every one to suspect Freddie—Mr. Burnham—of stealing it!

MYRTILLA (*dazed*). Did some one think he took it? Why, I never heard a word about that. My head is so busy with rhymes that half the time I don't know what's going on around me. (*She hands cake to FRED, who hands it to KITTY, who puts it on table down L.*) Oh, Freddie Burnham, is it true that you work in a place where they put up food for dear little pigs?

FRED. We put up a little dear food for pigs.

MYRTILLA. Oh, I'm so thankful! So thankful!

FRED. Why? Are you interested in pigs?

MYRTILLA. Yes, indeed. I'm writin' an ode on your return. You get a salary from your connection with pork, and I've tried so hard to find a rhyme for New York—"Freddie Burnham, from New York, who made a fortune vast through pork"—oh, I'll have the ode done in a jiffy now! (*Starts toward door, c.*)

FRED (*suddenly*). Myrtilla! Did you ever deliver that note to Kitty?

MYRTILLA. What note?

FRED. Oh, Myrtilla! Oh, woman! Go finish your ode before I finish you!

MYRTILLA (*dazed and unheeding, goes out slowly, saying to herself*). "Salary—gallery; Burnham—spurn 'em——"

FRED (*rushing to table, snatches book MRS. B. left there, seizes note from beneath cover, and holds the note in front of KITTY*). This is what wrecked two human lives! Though I didn't have money enough to marry you then, anyway, Kitty. I sent this note to you by Myrtilla. Read it. (*Goes c.*)

KITTY (*rising, takes the note and reads aloud*). "If you care for me at all and want to hear from me again, meet me at the end of the lane. I want to make up."

FRED. I sent it to you the night before I left for New York, so as to patch up our quarrel. And that addle-headed, poetry-scribbling creature—she slipped the note into the book cover and I said: "Don't forget it, on your life." She replied: "What rhymes with life?—rife, fife"—and never thought of the note again. "Ran away!" No wonder you thought so.

KITTY (*indignantly*). I never thought so! What an idea! You do get the strangest notions, Freddie.

FRED (R. C.). This is Borrowers' Day. You might return something you borrowed from me a long while ago, Kitty.

KITTY (L. C.). I never borrowed anything from you but trouble.

FRED. Something else.

KITTY. What? I don't remember.

FRED (*thumping his left side*). Something that ought to beat about here.

KITTY (*her hands over her heart*). Oh, no, Freddie—I couldn't return that, really. But—I'll give you one almost as good.

(*She dodges round table, L., as FRED starts toward her.*)

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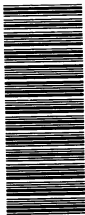
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